

## **Partial report on the trip from 18 October to 8 November to Rapcha + trek**

Number of participants 10

Anette Corpart, Marie-Christine Delafosse, Armelle Mc Gown, Danielle and Gérard Gelly, Myriam and Dominique Picard, Michel Doucin, Michel Griffon, Louis Laurent

### **Paris-KTM-Rapcha**

#### **18th October**

Smooth flight with Qatar (Roissy 4.15pm), arriving in Kathmandu (KTM) at around 10am the next day (2h stopover in Doha), even ahead of schedule. Tickets are priced 10 months in advance at €915. In Doha, traditional duty-free purchases for the trek.

A very convenient and competitive flight if you plan ahead.

*A little story: a member of the group had a misadventure when she discovered at Roissy that she had only booked a ticket to Doha! She had to pay a supplement that was more expensive than the Paris KTM departure ticket, given the high season. There was no room for her on our flight from Doha to KTM. She had to wait 17 hours in transit in Doha for the next flight. Yadav and Jase picked her up at 1am...*

#### **19 October**

On arrival at the airport, a little surprise: the visa system (\$50 / €48 for 30 days) has changed again:

*Info: You now have to put your passport in a reader; a digital document appears on a screen with the main elements of the passport: passport number, surname, first name, date of birth, which you just have to fill in with some secondary information, then print it out.*

Another surprise: very little waiting, but another fussy checkpoint to collect your luggage!

Accommodation in Thamel again at the Holy Himalaya, which hasn't aged too much. Efficient concierge service.

Traffic in the streets of KTM has become impossible: incessant traffic jams with motorbikes and cars. Pollution at its worst... I read that KTM had become one of the most polluted cities in Asia...

## For information on the tips on the way back

5000 rupees per porter: Bir Bahadur, Bishal, Bilal, Rayan, all from the village (the last 2 students)

8500 Ramesch for the cook and porter (59.5€) 15000 € rupees to Sakal guide and cook (105€)

15000 € rupees to Dilu (105€) so total Dilu 250+105 = 355€.

## 20th October

Very early departure for Phaplu by Jeep (get up at 5am!). ) for around 270 km; 8 per jeep: the 2 drivers + Yadav, Jase, Dilu, + the 10 of us +...Sakal's youngest daughter, who goes to school in KTM and spends a few days with her father; Road generally OK (tarmac apart from a few chaotic areas: bridges being rebuilt, landslides after the monsoon etc...) Monster traffic jam at the start because of the Dashain festivals (15 - 30 October) followed by the Tihar festival.

*Useful info: During the peak tourist season, to relieve congestion at KTM airport, flights to Phaplu and Lukla now leave from Rameschap airport near Manthali, 144 km to the east (taking the same road as us for much of the journey). Which explains Yadav's choice of jeep...*

Arrival in Phaplu at around 6.30 p.m.

Here's a big surprise: my rucksack, which I put on the gallery, has disappeared! (with money, my health card and other useful little items: fleece, headlamp, etc.).

The trip started well.... Advice for the next few days: even if the jeeps are cramped, take your bag with you, despite any suggestions you may receive!

Overnight at the Numbur Guest House lodge, where our friends have been staying for 30 years...not exactly the most comfortable in the area. But for a long time, it allowed us to pitch our tents in the garden at the start of our treks.

We leave our belongings at the lodge to give to the porters: the trek will end with a party at the lodge 15 days later.

## 21st October

In the morning (Saturday), I visit the Salleri market, where I buy a few things. The atmosphere is unsurprisingly calm because of Dashain.

Around 11 a.m. we set off on the track to Rapcha; it's a good track up to the pass, then quite rough; finally, a pleasant surprise: we arrive at the Basakhali school at around 2.30 p.m., a 3.5-hour ride on the track with, admittedly, good drivers.

All along the track, poles have been erected for the future power line. **Rapcha will be connected to the national grid in less than a year.**

*Info: The electrification project, made possible by the multiplication of tracks throughout Nepal, concerns the whole country. It is financed by the World Bank. Many of the communities we passed through on the trek are already connected.*

*Normally, small-scale local production, particularly from hydroelectric or solar sources, should be fed back into the grid, and a state body, the equivalent of EDF, will centralise and manage distribution in the various regions.*

On arrival at Rapcha, we move into the new girls' boarding school building above the school, due to open in April 2023. There are 14 girls at the moment.

Head: Tul Devi Rai Secretary: Phambi Rai Treasurer: Dhan Kumi Rai

*Info: The boarding school was financed by the English association "Stay at School" based in Winchester and its Nepalese "subsidiary".*

<https://www.facebook.com/stayatschool/>

As the girls are on holiday, we each settle into a (large) room (except for couples!). It's bizance...

The cooking is done by Sakal and his helper Ramesh, who will also be a porter on the trek. Copious and delicious cooking: long live Sakal!

Inside: WC and ice-cold shower;

Outside: WC and warm or hot shower if you wash during the day (solar panel).



## Rapcha stay

For a detailed account of the meetings, see the notes taken by Myriam and Anette.

As we came and went, we passed at least 6 "Anuvam" houses: all 6 had been cleaned at the back to avoid damp (see example opposite).

### 22 octobre

A busy day

Morning information meeting on the schools and the dispensary with

- Mr Chandra Bahadur Rai, Mayor of Rapcha
- Mr Man Bahadur Rai, Headmaster of Basakhali School
- Mr Kubir Rai, headmaster of the Thulodhunga School
- M. Bhojman Biswokarma, headmaster of the Bodu School
- Mr Kumar Rai, headmaster of the Dipendra Adarsa school (Rimku)
- Ms Tul Devi Rai, maths teacher and head of the boarding school.
- Ms Dhan Kumari Rai, Nepalese language teacher and treasurer
- Mrs Sukubari Rai, head of the dispensary



Afternoon

**Basakhali school:** empty, pupils on holiday

*Important news: The new national policy for secondary education*

*The aim is to raise the general level of education by creating 2 additional levels 11 and 12 before the school-leaving examination. These 2 levels could be either general or technical (e.g. agriculture).*

However, schools will have to choose between moving up to level 12 or returning to level 8. There will no longer be any intermediate level 10 schools.

It's a big challenge for Basakhali; Chandra and Man Bahadur Rai have to put together a project to present to the Ministry to upgrade the school to level 12. Yadav and Jasé are following this closely. Jase has abandoned his own project to create a higher technical school (lack of time and resources). He will therefore be able to help with the Basakhali project.

### School of Bodu

We made our way down the little paths, where we received a very warm welcome from the students (who had been brought together for the occasion) and teachers.

Official presentation of the €100;

Return to the night via the track

**In the evening,** I showed a 45-minute



slide show of the

various visits to the village of Anuvam since 1995, using photos by Marc Béchet, Jean-Claude Rimbault, Jacques Cluchat, Michel Griffon and myself.

I also showed the film of the last visit to Anuvam in 2022.

About 30 people attended. The atmosphere was good and the reactions excellent. Many people recognised themselves or their loved ones.

Unfortunately, Ganesh, Ram and Ananda, who were omnipresent in the photos, were missing that evening; I saw them the next day on different occasions. Yadav got a copy of the video, as did Jean-Claude Rimbault (very heavy, so difficult to send).

**23 october**

very busy day

**Rimku school.**



4 classrooms, including 2 funded by the Dr Friedmann Foundation

Superbly furnished classrooms, full of children's drawings

Beautiful frescoes on the outside wall, done by the headmaster himself

A very warm welcome from some of the students and 2 teachers. Official presentation of the €100

A little anecdote: When someone in the group said, as a compliment: "you have a lot of drawings here", Dilu understood "rubbish" and translated the equivalent in Nepali. The director was very embarrassed for a few minutes, but then clarified and rectified the situation, proving that translation sometimes has its limits...

**The farm** Around 11am we arrived at the farm. Visit with the person in charge (I didn't catch his name), who had a larger area than I



expected. Surprise arrival of Ganesh. After the visit, we went up to the walnut plantation: steep terrain, narrow terraces (3m wide on average), 80 dead trees out of 250. Of the 180, only a few are really in good shape:

Many are still only a few centimetres tall.



Long discussion with the manager :



Finally, given the difficulty of the crop, the objective seems to be less ambitious: they will be content to replace the 80 plants lost.

(According to them, the loss of these plants was largely due to the Covid period, when the plants being delivered were stored in poor conditions).



The 80 plants to be bought back will now come from the Jumla region. The cost per plant is €50, i.e. €400. So with €600, they've got plenty, even with transport costs;

### **Tholodunga School**

Meeting (see report elsewhere)

The school is planning to build a new room to be used as a computer room.

So for the new toilets they don't want to use the current terrace: they've chosen to install them about 10 m below the school on a strip of land about 3 m wide (with a steep path to get there); it seemed too narrow to us to put them across. I reminded them to send Vincent a diagram of the installation before approving it.

### **Dispensary (see Anette's notes)**

Meeting with Mayor Chandra, the Town Hall Secretary (?) and Sukubari

Rapcha (pop. 1,500), wad no. 2, accounts for 10% of the population of the Mapya Duskhosi municipality (pop. 15,000). The population is rather stagnant, with the departure of young people to Kathmandu and the drop in the birth rate counterbalanced by the ageing of the population, with life expectancy averaging almost 70 years today compared with 40 in the 1960s!

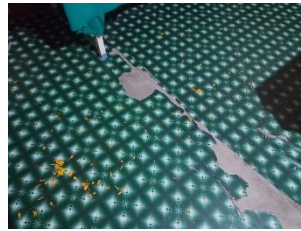
In administrative terms, the dispensary is now clearly under the authority of the Rapcha town council.

3 problems to be resolved by the town hall:

- 1 assistant post (not really medical, just a handyman) budgeted for but not filled.
- Water supply: Sukubari confirms that there is still a water shortage from April onwards. The mayor promised to devote part of the 2024 budget to this problem (I assume that the problem exists for the surrounding houses, including the town hall). I confirmed that Anuvam was concerned that the problem should be resolved once and for all and that it was ready to consider any request for participation if necessary (without obligation, of course).
- The linoleum in 2 rooms is in a deplorable state (damp); a solution needs to be found.

In terms of public health policy, the dispensary still depends on Khastap and the Ministry of Health.

The latest news is that the post of doctor at Khastap is no longer filled.



Khastap supplies the dispensary with standard medicines

The €500 medicine grant, managed directly by Sukubari (request) and by Yadav or Jase (purchase from KTM), enables the purchase of more specialised medicines.

Sukubari takes part in training courses at Phaplu hospital for new medicines.

Dispensary attendance 80 to 100 per month; down from the initial 140/150 or so

Other points: rubbish collection is being organised. A lorry passes along the tracks to collect the rubbish, otherwise the inhabitants take it directly to the incinerator, located next to the dispensary! (apparently financed by the Dr Friedmann Foundation). On the other hand, they don't know what to do with the glass.

Rapcha seemed clean overall

### Reception at the town hall

The mayor presented everyone with a traditional festive dress. Then 2 young girls presented us with a Nepalese dance, one after the other.

Then Gérard decided to imitate them. It could have been a tricky moment, but in the end it went down well (laughter) and the atmosphere went up a notch. Everyone got involved: Nepalese, French, the mayor, Yadav, Jase, Dilu etc... in short, it was a party!

The evening ended in the bar next door where we were served Dashain's cake.



### 24 October:

Dashain: a 12-day festival symbolising the victory of Ram (avatar of Vishnu) over the demon Ravan, when the elders bless their younger siblings in the Tika ceremony.

This year on 24 October.

At the boarding school, the high priest Turna Rai and his acolytes give us and a few villagers the tika with grains of white rice on the forehead. (The red dot is more Hindu). It's an impressive ceremony that lasts all morning. The first recipient must be a young virgin



We've all been there. Gérard and Marie-Christine had a special session to cure their physical ailments...

In the afternoon, we visited the sacred place of the animists. Dilu is getting tired of the translation. It's time for our stay in Rapcha to come to an end. Departure for the 11-day trek the next morning, without Marie-Christine who will be staying with Coman (our cook on the 2016 trek) who has a lodge with a restaurant below the Basakhali school. But that's another story for another report.

NB : photos by Myriam/dominique Picard , Armelle Mc Gown,, Yadav, myself